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Sharon A. Weiner

Purdue University, sweiner@purdue.edu

Lana W. Jackman

National Forum on Information Literacy, lj@infolit.org

Emily Prause

Purdue University, eprause@purdue.edu

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Information Literacy State Proclamation Project

Strategizing for Public Policy:

The Information Literacy State Proclamation Project

Sharon A. Weiner, EdD, MLS

Professor and W. Wayne Booker Chair in Information Literacy

Purdue University Libraries

West Lafayette, Indiana

sweiner@purdue.edu

Lana W. Jackman, PhD

President

National Forum on Information Literacy

Cambridge, Massachusetts

lj@infolit.org

Emily Prause, B.S.

Graduate Assistant

Purdue University Libraries

West Lafayette, Indiana

eprause@purdue.edu

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Abstract

This paper describes a project designed to raise the awareness of policymakers about the importance of information literacy to achieve societal goals. Issues benefit from the governmental support, prioritization, mandates, and funding that can result when there is policy behind them. Studies indicate that many people lack the ability to draw on quality sources of information for a variety of purposes. Attention by policymakers would accelerate the inclusion of information literacy in settings such as education, workforce training, citizenship preparation, and lifelong learning. One way to raise awareness of policymakers is by recommending a proclamation to government executives.

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“A popular government without popular information or the means of acquiring it is but a prologue to a farce, or a tragedy, or both” (Madison, 1822)

Since 1776, citizens of the United States have had a tradition of supporting and encouraging public access to information. Constitutional and statutory rights of freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, transparent governance, and democracy demonstrate this commitment.

Public policy involves the “political decisions for implementing programs to achieve societal goals” (Cochran & Malone, 1995). Issues benefit from the governmental support, prioritization, mandates, and funding that can result when there is policy behind them. Becoming part of a policy agenda is a required step for an issue to become policy. This paper describes a project designed to raise awareness of information literacy to influence policy agendas.

Information literacy is a group of related competencies that are essential for success in school, the workplace, and life decision-making and problem-solving. It involves the ability to recognize when there is a need for information and then to be able to find, evaluate, and use the needed information effectively (ACRL, 1989). The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, a coalition of leading educational stakeholders in the U.S., included information literacy in its framework for 21st century learning. This framework comprises skills, knowledge, and expertise necessary for student success (Framework, 2011). The American Association for Colleges and Universities recommends information literacy as an essential learning outcome to prepare for 21st century

challenges (College Learning, 2007). Many educational regional and programmatic accreditation organizations include information literacy in their standards (Saunders, 2007). The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) identified information literacy as a key 21st century skill/competency (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012). This international forum of thirty democracies, including the United States, works to address the economic, social and environmental challenges of globalization.

U.S. studies and national report cards continue to paint a less than optimal picture of the upskilling of the American workforce and leadership in the world economy. Many students and people in the workforce have not developed the habit of finding and effectively using credible sources of information for a variety of purposes (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012; Alliance, 2012; Weiner, 2011; Duke & Asher, 2011; Goldin & Katz, 2008; Williams & Rowlands, 2007). Information literacy is central to lifelong learning and to addressing the challenges of learning, working, living, and voting in democratic, information societies. Lifelong learning enables individuals, communities and nations to attain their goals and to take advantage of opportunities in the evolving global environment for shared benefit. It assists them and their institutions to meet technological, economic and social challenges, to redress disadvantage, and to advance the well-being of all (Garner, 2006). In 2005, experts held a colloquium in Alexandria, Egypt to discuss the interrelated roles of lifelong learning and information literacy in the modern world. The result of that meeting was the issuance of the Alexandria Proclamation, in which information literacy and lifelong learning were declared the “Beacons of the Information Society.” It also affirmed:

Information Literacy lies at the core of lifelong learning. It empowers people in all walks of life to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to

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achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals. It is a basic human right in a digital world and promotes social inclusion of all nations (Beacons, 2005).

More recently, Bishop comprehensively explored the issue of access to information as a human right (Bishop, 2012).

Attention by policymakers would accelerate the inclusion of information literacy in settings such as education, workforce training, citizenship preparation, and lifelong learning. One way to raise the awareness of policymakers is by recommending a proclamation to government executives. This paper describes such a project; it begins with background on federal executive proclamations in the U.S.; a discussion of the state of information literacy policy; a description of the national Information Literacy Proclamation Project; and concludes with recommendations for furthering the process of public policy adoption about information literacy.

The History of Proclamations

The President of the United States of America has power through the provisions of Article II of the Constitution and through statutory interpretation to make unilateral legislative decisions. Proclamations are one tool the President may use to manifest unilateral decisions. According to the D'Angelo Law Library at the University of Chicago website, proclamations are “formal public announcements, often relating to ceremonial or celebratory occasions, that can also have significant legal consequences” (2012). However, proclamations are issued for a variety of reasons that far expand this rudimentary definition.

Historically, proclamations have been issued in times of war to declare war, call forth troops, and enact war-related legislation involving issues such as clemency or suspending the writ of habeas corpus. Abraham Lincoln described his power to free slaves via the Emancipation

Proclamation as “an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity” (Basler et al., 1953-1955, p. 28). The President, according to the Constitution, is the commander-in-chief of the army and navy and thus has the sole discretionary power to enact legislation through proclamation or otherwise to “save the government from destruction” or “call forth the militia” (Whiting, 1862, p. 66-67).

Presidential proclamations have been and continue to be used to implement policy and expand institutional power. Proclamations communicate decisions from the president to a large, diverse populace (Gazino, 2001). The idea that proclamations are largely hortatory can lead the government and the public to disregard them, but their legal weight is an indication of their importance (Rottinghaus & Maier, 2007, p. 338-339). Proclamations have had a “substantial impact on economic and domestic policy” (339).

In a study conducted by Rottinghaus and Maier, hortatory proclamations were extracted, leaving more legislatively weighted proclamations for analysis. They found that on rare occasions, proclamations have granted presidential pardons (339). Proclamations dominated in three domains: trade, national parks, and international agreements (340). Presidents have the power to proclaim national monuments. Proclamations of natural monuments have piqued the interest of many as they have an impact on policy making, i.e., they “preserve existing rights, restrict future ones, designate a managing authority, and provide implementation guidance” (Belco, 2009, p. 606). Throughout history, presidents have “proclaimed national monuments at the request of Congress, in opposition to Congress, and to resolve congressional gridlock” (609).

Presidential proclamations have been largely celebratory or commemorative; however, they should not be dismissed as meaningless. Presidents throughout history used proclamations for substantive legal purposes. To find full documentation of presidential proclamations, it is

worth visiting <http://www.polsci.uh.edu/database/aboutproc.asp> and <http://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/proclamations>.

States also have the right to make proclamations; however, there is a shocking lack of scholarly reports on gubernatorial proclamations. Gubernatorial proclamations have the power of unilateral policymaking at the state level, and yet they are underrepresented in the literature.

The State of Information Literacy Policy

Information literacy is progressing toward a place on the policy agenda. The essential process of consciousness-raising and discussion is typically long and consists of “softening up the system” (Kingdon, 2003, p. 2010). Information literacy advocates have argued the need for its inclusion in public policy for decades. The process began with Paul Zurkowski, who coined the term, “information literacy.” He commented in 1974 that societal information literacy was in the public interest. He recommended a national program to achieve universal information literacy within ten years (Zurkowski, 1974, p. 23, 27). Although, this did not occur, information literacy is included in the educational accreditation standards for many geographic regions and disciplines (Saunders, 2007). It is included as a key competency in studies of workforce needs (Weiner, 2011b). Major information literacy summits held in Prague (Prague Declaration, 2003), Alexandria (Garner, 2006), Moscow (Moscow Declaration, 2012), and Washington (Perrault, 2009) declared it to be a societal issue and proposed recommendations for related policy.

In contrast, information and communication technologies (ICT) policy has a well-developed history dating to the origins of the concept of the “Information Society” in the 1960s (Machlup, 1968). An executive order established a National Spatial Data Infrastructure “to support public and private sector applications of geospatial data” (Clinton, 1994). But having a technological infrastructure does not mean that people have the abilities to find and use

information effectively (Catts & Lau, 2008; Munyua, et al., 2009; Epstein et al., 2011; Basili, 2011; Hanna et al., 2012). Recognition that there is a problem can increase the likelihood of inclusion on an agenda (Kingdon, 2003 p. 198).

By coupling a new issue to existing policy priorities, its advocates can “take advantage of political receptivity at certain points in time to push the package of problem and solution” (Kingdon, 2003, p. 202). An examination of information literacy policy in the U.S. revealed that information literacy is associated with major societal policy issues that require multifaceted and systemic solutions. Those included:

- educational reform from preschool through higher education;
- workplace readiness of graduating students;
- lifelong learning;
- an informed citizenry;
- a globally competitive workforce (Weiner 2011, p. 302)

This is an indication that the process of “softening” the system is occurring.

There are many ways that an issue can become policy. Policymakers become aware of emerging issues through processes that are often ambiguous, complex, and lengthy. Those processes involve raising awareness about an issue, investigation of its legitimacy and political implications, and advocacy for it. One strategy that can raise awareness among policymakers is to recommend that a government executive issue a proclamation related to a concern. These can generate publicity, send political signals, make strong statements of policy, and raise awareness (Cooper, 2002, p. 48). They are an easy way to respond to constituents, and “the very character of the proclamation adds a tone of seriousness and formality. It conveys the message that the

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president is here speaking not for a particular administration or even for the executive branch but formally and on behalf of all the people. Proclamations afford a president a tool that can be used to round out a policy mix” (Cooper, 2002, p. 137). Such recommendations are evaluated by the staff of the official, so the staff must become informed about the issue before making a decision on whether to forward it to the official for a signature. Proclamations provide opportunities for publicity and programming relating to an issue.

The Information Literacy Proclamation Project

The National Forum on Information Literacy (NFIL) is an organization whose purpose is advocacy for information literacy. The member organizations represent government, business, health, and education sectors. The NFIL organized several international summits to bring attention to policymakers and others the role of information literacy in lifelong learning, critical thinking, the digital divide, a competitive workforce, economic development, and an informed citizenry (Weiner, 2011, p. 302-3). While there has been progress in including information literacy in policy such as some accreditation standards for educational institutions, the gaps in U.S. competitiveness and workforce preparedness require attention. The NFIL leaders decided to pursue executive proclamations at the national and state levels to designate October as Information Literacy Awareness month, since elected officials have much influence on agenda setting (Kingdon, 2003, p. 199). Presidential proclamations are a form of direct action affecting individuals outside of government (as opposed to other executive orders, which affect government officials and agencies) (Cooper, 2002, p. 16). They “are often used because they are quick, convenient, and relatively easy mechanisms for moving significant policy initiatives” (Cooper, 2002, p. 58).

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The Information Literacy Proclamation Project is a grass roots initiative to influence policy agenda-setting. The primary goal of the project is for the 50 state and territory governors to proclaim that the month of October would recognize information literacy as an essential 21st century competency citizens need to pursue educational opportunity and economic viability. It would raise awareness each year across the country about information literacy and provide justification for promotional programs, displays, and publicity. It is a step a strategy toward policy agenda-setting for information literacy. Since the community of information literacy advocates is international, it could serve as a model for people in other countries who saw a need for policy related to information literacy.

In 2009, the NFIL worked with Senators Edward Kennedy and John Kerry in Massachusetts and Richard Lugar in Indiana to support a presidential proclamation. President Obama signed the proclamation, which coincided with the 20th anniversary celebration of the NFIL. Following this success, Lana Jackman, President of NFIL, worked with the governor's office in Massachusetts to obtain a similar proclamation for the Commonwealth. Governor Deval Patrick signed that proclamation in 2011. The Vice-President of NFIL, Sharon Weiner, then contacted information literacy advocates in the 50 states and U.S. territories to ask them to take responsibility for submitting proclamation recommendations to their respective governors' offices. By June 2013, 20 states (and the city of Anchorage, Alaska) had official proclamations (See Appendix 1 for links to proclamations). Each proclamation is unique, although most borrowed text from the Massachusetts proclamation, which was the first. Each links information literacy to the state's issues and priorities.

Recommendations for Strategies for Establishing Information Literacy Policy

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Historically, the need to have access to information and use it effectively to promote the advancement of knowledge, economic growth, and general welfare has been a tacit assumption. Federal laws do govern access to **government** information such as the Freedom of Information Act, the United States Copyright Act, and the Sunshine in Government Act. Yet, the U.S. does not insure that every American has the range of information literacy competencies needed to maximize social and economic opportunity. Studies from the educational and business communities continue to reveal a worrisome lack of academic achievement and workforce development skills. To integrate information literacy throughout society, the following policy recommendations need consideration:

- Further develop indicators and publicize them. Information literacy is at a stage in the policy process in which there is a growing awareness of a problem. Indicators raise awareness; if they show that conditions violate values or compare unfavorably with other relevant units, such as countries, there can be motivation to change (Catts & Lau, 2008; Kingdon, 2003, p. 197-8; Zahariadis, 1999).
- Organize discussions about the importance of information literacy policy with new government officials and those seeking elected office. Changes in governmental administration are more important for agenda setting than organized interest groups (Kingdon, 2003, p. 198-9). Elected officials promote their perspectives on problems and solutions and set agendas (Kingdon, 2003, p. 199).
- Organize discussions with interest groups that may be able to add information literacy policy to existing agendas. “Interest group pressure does have positive impact on the government’s agenda, and does so with considerable frequency. A group that mobilizes

support, writes letters, sends delegations, and stimulates its allies to do the same can get government officials to pay attention to its issues” (Kingdon, 2003, p. 49).

- Organize discussions with governmental administrators, congressional staff, and academic stakeholders about information literacy. These groups “test ideas for consideration on policy agendas through speeches, congressional hearings, press leaks, policy papers, and informal discussions. The policies that emerge are technically feasible, aligned with community values, have acceptable financial constraints, and are likely to be accepted by the public and politicians” (Kingdon, 2003, p. 200).
- Link information literacy with other policies or problems. Presidents, in particular, favor solutions that address multiple problems because it is more likely that they will pass through the legislature (Light, 1995, p. 228). “Education reform and workforce readiness are high priorities, and information literacy should be included as a key competency to achieve those goals” (Weiner, 2011b). Those who couple issues successfully are
 - well-connected and persistent;
 - holders of higher administrative or partisan positions;
 - members of multiple arenas or institutions;
 - willing to spend considerable amounts of resources (time, energy, money, etc.) to make their ideas and proposals palatable to policymakers;
 - present at critical meetings (Zahariadis, 1999)
- Establish a Presidential Information Literacy Commission. An executive order could create such a group to recommend indicators, advise organizations and agencies, and monitor the national implementation of standards for information literacy (Cooper, 2002, p. 30-32). Presidential commissions can produce significant results and policy changes.

“They often provide important information that can become the focus of ongoing consideration, both within government and in public opinion” (Cooper, 2002, p. 54).

- Issue executive orders for federal and state agencies to provide ongoing training in information literacy for professional development and lifelong learning. Presidents can issue executive orders directed to government employees “to leverage a much larger change in the society as a whole...When government issues significant policy changes with respect to employment, it sets out markers that influence demands in the private sector as well” (Cooper, 2002, p. 65).

These actions can lead to outcomes that will establish information literacy as an expectation in the educational system; in the workforce; for patients and healthcare providers; in organizational mission statements, strategic plans, and personnel evaluation systems; and in professional development programs.

Conclusion

Both information literacy and lifelong learning are concepts requiring co-investment by government, educational providers, employers, individuals, and other partners (Business Round Table, 2001). To retain an international competitive advantage, Americans need to have the ability to think critically, problem-solve, communicate effectively, collaborate, and analyze and integrate information (Swallow, 2012).

Representing a citizens’ initiative to support issues that matter to a community, the Information Literacy Proclamation Project is an important step in the policy process, raising awareness about its role in educational success, a competitive workforce, and economic development. The inclusion of information literacy in both state and federal policies will support

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efforts to prosper and sustain a global competitive advantage. Most importantly, it will empower citizens to pursue academic, personal, and professional fulfillment.

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Appendix 1. Information Literacy Proclamations

This list includes the national proclamation of October as Information Literacy Awareness Month as well as those of the states that issued them as of January 2013. It includes the name of the governor who issued the proclamation and the hyperlink.

United States, President Barack Obama

http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Presidential-Proclamation-National-Information-Literacy-Awareness-Month

Alaska, Sean Parnell

<http://gov.alaska.gov/parnell/press-room/full-proclamation.html?pr=6247>

Colorado, John W. Hickenlooper

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdelib/download/pdf/LiteracyMonth.pdf>

Connecticut, Dannel P. Malloy

<http://infolit.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Connecticut.jpg>

Delaware, Jack A. Markell

<http://infolit.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/DE-proclamation.jpg>

Illinois, Pat Quinn

<http://infolit.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Illinois-IL2012.pdf>

Indiana, Mitch Daniels

<http://infolit.org/indiana/>

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Kentucky, Steven Beshear

<http://governor.ky.gov/Lists/Proclamations/DispForm.aspx?ID=167>

Maine, Paul R. Lepage

<http://infolit.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Maine1.pdf>

Maryland, Martin O'Malley

<http://infolit.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Maryland.jpg>

Massachusetts, Deval Patrick

<http://www.mass.gov/governor/constituentservices/recognition/issuedproclamations/2011/1110-info-literacy.html>

Missouri, Jeremiah W. (Jay) Nixon

<http://infolit.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Missouri-IL-2012.pdf>

Montana, Brian Schweitzer

<http://infolit.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Montana.pdf>

New York, Andrew M. Cuomo

<http://open.nysenate.gov/legislation/bill/J5103-2011>

Ohio, John R. Kasich

<http://library.ohio.gov/sites/default/files/Resolution-LiteracyOct2012web.pdf>

Oregon, John A. Kitzhaber

<http://listsmart.osl.state.or.us/pipermail/oyan/2012-July/000275.html>

Rhode Island, Lincoln D. Chafee

<http://www.governor.ri.gov/documents/proclamations/2012/Oct/Info%20Literacy.pdf>

South Carolina, Nikki R. Haley

<http://dc.statelibrary.sc.gov/handle/10827/9253>

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Tennessee, Bill Haslam

<http://tnsos.net/publications/proclamations/files/202.pdf>

Texas, Rick Perry

<http://infolit.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/TX-proclamation.pdf>

Virginia, Robert F. McDonnell

<http://www.governor.virginia.gov/ourcommonwealth/proclamations/viewproc.cfm?id=192>